Globenix Multidisciplinary Journal
Publisher: Globenix Publisher | ISSN: XXXX-XXXX (Online)

A PHILOSOPHICAL EXAMINATION OF THE IMPACT OF ANTHROPOGENIC ACTIVITIES ON THE ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

This paper explores how people are affecting the environment and causing many different problems. The core issue is that humans often see themselves as the masters of nature as if the environment exists just for us to use or even misuse. This attitude leads to huge, negative consequences like pollution, degradation, and over-exploitation of natural resources. The study analyzes these human actions and found that we have essentially taken over natural resources for our own benefit, resulting in various kinds of damage. Finally, the paper concludes that we need to control and limit our activities if we want to make the environment a healthy, sustainable place for all living things. Does this version capture the original meaning in a way that's easier to understand? The paper hopes that check mating and curtailing of the activities of the human agents on the environment will make the environment a better place for the biotic community.

Article Information

Article Type: Research Article
Received: 03 Nov 2025
Accepted: 18 Nov 2025
Published: 22 Nov 2025
Volume: 1, Issue: 1 (Nov-Dec) - 2025
Pages: 01-16

Keywords

Ethics, Anthropogenic, environment, Biotic community.

Introduction

Human beings, whether seen as creations of God or as products of evolution, occupy a central place in the universe. It is often assumed that everything else exists for human benefit. However, people are meant to treat all forms of life and the environment with respect and responsibility, using them

wisely for the good of everyone and for the well-being of the earth itself. Unfortunately, reality shows that humans often exploit and destroy the very environment that sustains them, ignoring its essential role in supporting life.

According to Christian teaching, when God created the world and everything in it, He entrusted it to humanity to care for. People were meant to provide for their needs using what nature offers and through their own creativity and intelligence. The natural world plants, animals, rivers, minerals was given as a resource to sustain life. Human ingenuity was meant to be used not only for survival but also to improve life and protect the environment.

Yet today, humans seem to have become enemies of the natural world they were meant to protect. As caretakers of nature, we have instead caused serious harm through pollution, deforestation, environmental degradation, and the destruction of ecosystems. Since the Industrial Revolution, industrial waste and harmful gases have filled the atmosphere, leading to problems like ozone layer depletion, global warming, and increased disease (Thiroux 1998, 418).

Only in recent times have people begun to realize that natural resources—plants, animals, forests, minerals are not endless. For centuries, humans assumed that nature's resources were limitless and existed solely for human use. But industrial growth and modern consumerism have revealed the truth: there are limits, and unchecked exploitation can destroy entire species and ecosystems. In many African societies, there is still little awareness that plants and animals can actually go extinct (Thiroux 1998, 419).

The Industrial Revolution introduced powerful machines that encouraged large-scale deforestation, mining, and farming. These activities have caused many environmental issues: excess carbon dioxide, reduced rainfall, desertification, and the loss of wildlife. In Africa especially in countries like Nigeria mining for crude oil, coal, and other minerals has led to serious environmental pollution and degradation.

A major environmental concern often discussed in the media is the depletion of the ozone layer, which affects Africa as well. Industrial waste is largely blamed for this damage, even though most large industries are located in Europe and North America. Some scientists suggest that because the earth's atmosphere circulates globally, pollution from the industrialized West eventually affects other parts of the world, including Africa. Still, the full truth of this connection remains uncertain and complex.

Clarification of Concepts

The concepts to be clarified are: Anthropocentric activities, Environmental Ethics.

Overview of the Anthropogenic Activities on the Environment

The root of the concept 'anthropogenic' is the Greek word 'anthropoid' which means man as a generic word for human beings. Anthropogenic activities would mean human activities on the planet earth or on the environment. Human beings, whether viewed as creations of God or as products of evolution, hold a central place in the universe. Many believe that everything else in

existence is meant to serve humanity. However, people are called to live responsibly, showing respect for all forms of life and caring for the environment that sustains them. Sadly, the reality is quite the opposite: humans often exploit and destroy the very world that makes life possible.

Christian teaching holds that when God created the world and everything in it, He entrusted its care to humanity. People were expected to meet their needs using what nature provides, as well as through their creativity and intelligence. The natural world plants, animals, rivers, and minerals was meant to sustain life, while human wisdom was meant to improve it and preserve the balance of creation.

Today, however, humanity has turned against nature instead of protecting it. The same beings who were meant to be stewards of the earth have become its greatest threat. Through pollution, deforestation, and the careless use of natural resources, humans have damaged the environment and disrupted the ecosystems that support life. Since the Industrial Revolution, industrial waste and harmful gases have polluted the air, leading to problems like global warming, ozone depletion, and increased disease (Thiroux 1998, 418).

It is only in recent decades that people have begun to understand that natural resources are not limitless. For centuries, many assumed that forests, animals, water, and minerals would last forever and could be used without restraint. But modern industrialization and consumer habits have shown otherwise. Uncontrolled exploitation can wipe out entire species and destroy ecosystems. In many African societies, there is still limited awareness that plants and animals can actually disappear forever (Thiroux 1998, 419).

The Industrial Revolution brought machines that made it easier to clear forests, mine resources, and expand farmland. These activities, though aimed at progress, have caused serious environmental damage—rising carbon emissions, reduced rainfall, desertification, and the loss of wildlife. In Africa, especially in countries like Nigeria, mining for crude oil, coal, and other minerals has polluted the air, water, and soil, leaving lasting scars on the environment.

One major issue frequently discussed in the media is the thinning of the ozone layer, which affects Africa as well. Industrial waste is a leading cause of this problem, even though most large industries are located in Europe and North America. Some scientists believe that because the atmosphere circulates globally, pollution from industrialized countries eventually spreads to other regions, including Africa. Still, the exact extent of this connection remains uncertain.

According to Jacques Thiroux (1998, 419):

> As we carelessly cut down trees to make wood and paper products, we slowly began to notice that our forests were vanishing. The oil crisis of 1973, when Arab nations restricted oil supplies, also opened our eyes to another truth that the world's oil reserves are limited, and we cannot keep pumping oil from the earth forever.

As rainfall decreased and water supplies began to shrink, people slowly came to understand that even water is not an unlimited resource. Each of these realizations that forests, oil, and now water have limits—has been a wake-up call. We are learning, though sometimes too late, that the earth's

resources will not last if we continue to destroy them without restoring what we take. Unless we learn to conserve and replenish what nature provides, we will eventually exhaust the planet's gifts.

Scientific progress, originally aimed at improving human life, has brought remarkable benefits. Many discoveries have made daily living easier and healthier, and for a long time, scientists were widely trusted to act ethically and in the public interest. Agricultural research, in particular, was seen as a noble effort to improve food production and fight hunger (Hardon, 1997, p. 52). However, the rise of genetic engineering has complicated this picture (Wagner, 1996, p. 123). New technologies, by their very nature, tend to challenge long-held beliefs and traditions, forcing society to rethink its relationship with nature and with itself.

Despite their advantages, these developments have had serious effects on both people and the environment. For example, genetically modified (transgenic) crops are sometimes promoted as tools for sustainable agriculture. Yet, much of this research is driven by large chemical corporations focused on developing crops that rely heavily on chemical inputs. Such an approach often serves corporate interests more than environmental well-being and could lead to ecological harm. Critics note that these crops are frequently tested in developing countries, where environmental regulations may be weaker (Carr & Levidow, 1997, p. 41).

If intensive farming methods continue, the result will likely be even greater environmental damage. Expanding agriculture into fragile ecosystems like tropical forests and savannas threatens biodiversity and undermines conservation efforts. Instead of healing the planet, these practices risk deepening the environmental crisis we already face.

Ethics

Ethics, often referred to as moral philosophy, is the study of what is right and wrong, or good and bad, in human behavior. Velasquez (1996, p. 243) describes it as the examination of moral choices and conduct. More broadly, the term "ethics" can also refer to a set of moral values or a framework that guides how people ought to act.

Ethics raises deep questions about how we should live our lives. Should we pursue happiness, knowledge, virtue, or creativity? If we seek happiness, should it be our own or that of everyone? It also confronts us with real-life dilemmas: Is it acceptable to lie if it serves a good purpose? Can we justify living in comfort while others suffer from hunger? Is war ever right when it leads to the loss of innocent lives? Is cloning or destroying embryos for medical research morally permissible? And what responsibilities do we have toward future generations or the other living beings that share our planet? These are the kinds of questions ethics seeks to address at both personal and societal levels.

At its core, ethics deals with how people make moral decisions and what standards we use to determine whether an action is right or wrong. The words ethics and morality are closely connected, and today they are often used interchangeably. In earlier times, "ethics" referred mainly to the academic study of moral behavior—what philosophers call moral philosophy.

Although ethics has always been a branch of philosophy, it is also closely linked to other disciplines such as sociology, history, theology, economics, and biology because moral questions often arise in these fields. However, ethics differs from the sciences in that it does not focus on gathering facts; instead, it deals with principles, values, and judgments about how people ought to behave.

Echekwube (2006, p. 29) defines ethics as the area of philosophy that studies human actions in relation to right and wrong. He adds that it involves reflection on human behavior and the moral standards that guide it. Accordingly,

> It is the systematic study of human behavior, focusing on the person as a rational being. Its goal is to understand and explain the reasons for judging human actions as right or wrong, good or bad, and as fitting or unfitting for a rational individual..

Pantaleon Iroegbu (2005, p. 22) describes ethics as both the science and art of human behavior. He views it as a branch of philosophy that studies human actions in terms of right and wrong, or lawful and unlawful conduct. For him, ethics is the study of good and evil where good represents what should be done, and evil represents what must be avoided.

Within the broad field of ethics, there is a specialized area known as environmental ethics. Alicia Belair (2000, p. 21) defines this branch as the study of how people think about and act toward their environment — whether thoughtfully or carelessly — and how those actions affect the planet as a whole. Similarly, Andrew Finn (2001, p. 18) explains environmental ethics as the reflection on the range of human ideas, beliefs, and cultural influences that shape our decisions about the natural world. He emphasizes the importance of understanding humanity's place within the broader web of life.

Carr and Levidow (1997, p. 10) describe environmental ethics as the moral evaluation of both short- and long-term human decisions that influence the environment. This includes how people value and use land beyond their immediate personal interests. Thiroux (1998, p. 417) further defines environmental ethics as the study of ecological and biological relationships within ecosystems, how they connect with human societies, and the moral foundations guiding human decisions that impact the environment.

In essence, environmental ethics examines the values and moral choices that determine how we treat the natural world. It asks how far humans are willing to damage the environment in pursuit of personal goals, and at what point such actions violate moral responsibility. The discipline promotes the responsible use of the earth's natural resources to ensure their continued availability. This sustainability depends on maintaining a healthy global ecosystem and recognizing that humans are not separate from nature, but integral parts of it.

Environmental ethics raises important moral questions. For example: Is it justifiable for farmers in developing countries to use slash-and-burn farming to clear land? Should mining companies be obligated to restore land and ecosystems after operations end? How does a restored environment compare in value to the untouched natural one? Many argue that it is morally wrong to

destroy ecosystems or consume excessive natural resources. But why is it wrong because environmental destruction harms human welfare, or because nature itself has value and deserves respect regardless of human benefit? These are some of the core issues environmental ethics seeks to answer.

The field also explores the difference between instrumental value and intrinsic value. Something has instrumental value if it serves as a means to achieve another goal; it has intrinsic value if it is valuable in itself. For instance, fruit has instrumental value for bats because it sustains them, but most would not say the fruit has value simply for existing. A teacher has instrumental value to students seeking knowledge, yet as a human being, the teacher also possesses intrinsic worth. Similarly,

A wild plant might have instrumental value if it provides medicine or beauty to humans, but it may also hold intrinsic value simply by existing as part of nature. When something has intrinsic value, people have a moral responsibility to protect it or at least avoid harming it (O'Neil, 1992, p. 201).

> Traditional Western ethics has often been anthropocentric, meaning human-centered. This view grants intrinsic value mainly to humans, while assigning lesser or purely instrumental value to other forms of life. Aristotle, for example, believed that everything in nature exists for the sake of humanity.

From this perspective, harming animals or destroying nature is considered wrong only if it indirectly harms people. Immanuel Kant also reflected this idea, arguing that cruelty to animals is morally objectionable because it might make people cruel toward other humans. Thus, environmental harm is seen as wrong primarily when it threatens human welfare a view known as weak anthropocentrism.

However, when environmental ethics developed as a distinct field in the early 1970s, it directly challenged this human-centered approach. It questioned the moral superiority of humans and explored whether nature itself animals, plants, rivers, and ecosystems might possess intrinsic value that deserves moral consideration. Some scholars, though, believe it is unnecessary to abandon anthropocentrism entirely. They advocate for what is known as enlightened or prudential anthropocentrism, which argues that our duty to protect the environment stems from our responsibility to other human beings. From this perspective, environmental ethics provides the moral foundation for creating social policies that protect the planet and repair environmental damage not only for nature's sake but for the continued survival and well-being of humanity itself.

Metaphysical Basis of Anthropogenic Activities on the Environment

Christian thought has often been interpreted as promoting the excessive use of natural resources by emphasizing humanity's superiority over other living beings and portraying the natural world as something created for human benefit. This idea finds support in certain biblical passages, which have been used to justify a human-centered, or anthropocentric, worldview one that places people at the center of creation and sees nature primarily as a tool for human use. For instance, in the Book of Genesis (1:27–28),

> the Bible says that God created human beings in His image, blessed them, and instructed them to "be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and every living thing that moves upon the earth."

This verse has often been interpreted to mean that humans hold authority over the natural world and may use its resources as they see fit., Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk. 3, Pt 2, Ch 112) argued that nonhuman animals are "ordered to man's use". According to Thiroux (1998, 425), the Judeo-Christian idea that humans are created in the image of the transcendent supernatural God, who is radically separate from nature, also by extension radically separates humans themselves from nature. This ideology further opened the way for untrammelled exploitation of nature. Modern Western science itself, Thiroux argues, was "cast in the matrix of Christian theology" so that it too inherited the orthodox.

> The idea of Christian arrogance toward nature suggests that modern environmental destruction is linked not only to science and technology but also to certain long-standing religious attitudes.

Thus, Historian Lynn White argued that while technological advances have made large-scale environmental damage possible, the deeper cause lies in the Judeo-Christian worldview itself. This tradition, he claimed, has encouraged the belief that humans have the right to dominate and exploit nature without limits.

However, White also pointed out that not all Christian thought supports this view. He highlighted alternative perspectives such as those of St. Francis of Assisi that promote humility, respect, and harmony with nature. These minority traditions, he suggested, could offer a corrective to the human-centered mindset that has contributed to the ecological crisis. Around the same time, the Stanford ecologist, Paul Ehrlich, published *The Population Bomb* (1968, 87), warning that the growth of human population threatened the viability of planetary life-support systems. The sense of environmental crisis stimulated by those and other popular works was intensified by NASA's production and wide dissemination of a particularly potent image of earth from space taken at Christmas 1968 and featured in the *Scientific American* in September 1970. Here, plain to see, was a living, shining planet voyaging through space and shared by all of humanity, a precious vessel vulnerable to pollution and to the overuse of its limited capacities.

The call for a "basic change of values" in connection to the environment (a call that could be interpreted in terms of either instrumental or intrinsic values) reflected a need for the development of environmental ethics as a new sub-discipline of philosophy. Aldo Leopold had advocated an appreciation and conservation of things "natural, wild and free". Their concerns were motivated by a combination of ethical and aesthetic responses to nature as well as a rejection of crudely economic approaches to the value of natural objects. It was thought that a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise (Ehrlich, 1968, 89).

However, Leopold himself provided no systematic ethical theory or framework to support these ethical ideas concerning the environment. His views therefore presented a challenge and opportunity for moral theorists: could some ethical theory be devised to justify the injunction to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biosphere? The concept of Christian arrogance toward nature implies that today's environmental problems are not only the result of science and technology but also stem from deep-rooted religious beliefs. Historian Lynn White suggested that,

> Although modern tools have made large-scale environmental harm possible, the real foundation of this attitude comes from the Judeo-Christian tradition. According to him, this worldview has long encouraged the idea that humans are entitled to rule over nature and use it as they wish.

At the same time, White acknowledged that some Christian perspectives challenge this notion. He pointed to figures like St. Francis of Assisi, who emphasized humility, care, and a sense of unity with all living things. White believed that such teachings could serve as a remedy to the dominant human-centered approach that has fueled much of the world's environmental destruction

The Nature of the Environmental Crisis in Africa

The environmental crisis in sub-Saharan Africa can generally be understood from three main angles: ignorance and poverty, the impact of modern science and technology, and the influence of political conflict and global economic forces. In other words, to grasp the full picture of Africa's environmental challenges, one must consider both the role of traditional ways of life and the effects of modern development.

Most Africans still live in rural areas, where people often lack basic amenities such as clean water and proper sanitation.

> In many communities, rivers become polluted with human waste, leading to outbreaks of diseases like dysentery, typhoid, and cholera. This situation is not necessarily a result of resistance to change but rather a reflection of widespread poverty. Still, poverty does not completely excuse the ways in which traditional practices sometimes contribute to environmental problems that cause suffering and death across the continent (Oyibo, 2004, p. 45).

Despite these challenges, traditional African societies have long maintained a deep respect for nature. In the past, people treated the land, rivers, and forests with reverence, often performing rituals to express gratitude or apology to the earth after disturbing it for example, when planting crops. This attitude reflected an awareness of balance between humans and nature, something modern society has largely forgotten in its drive for exploitation and control.

Traditional African communities understood the importance of managing natural elements such as water, soil, and air responsibly. They practiced a moral code that discouraged taking more from nature than was necessary for survival. This belief system often gave sacred value to elements of the natural world earth, forests, rivers, and wind viewing them as both natural and divine. While

such beliefs were not always purely religious, they served as an effective means of promoting environmental care and sustainability.

The traditional African ethic of care toward the environment likely stemmed from a combination of reverence for nature and limited technological capacity to exploit it. Even so, this moral restraint carried great value. It emphasized respect, balance, and preservation rather than domination and destruction. Whether or not development was present in these traditional settings, the principle of taking only what one needs from nature remains a worthy and credible ethical standard. Having explored how traditional societies have shaped environmental attitudes, it is now important to turn to how modern Africa has contributed to today's ecological crisis.

Land

From a physicalist perspective, humans are seen as products of the earth, sharing the same physical elements that make up the natural world. A dualist, on the other hand, would argue that human beings are made up of both material and immaterial aspects — body and mind. Either way, this connection shows that we are naturally linked to the earth. The land provides the essential resources that sustain human life.

According to Ezema (2003),

> Modern Africa's approach to land use has strayed from the values embedded in traditional philosophy. In the past, land was treated with care and reverence, but today, widespread exploitation has taken its place.

Ezema notes that modern society often overlooks the importance of forests and trees in maintaining environmental balance.

> The pursuit of development has led to the neglect of traditional conservation practices, as though progress cannot coexist with the protection of nature. This neglect has caused serious environmental damage, including erosion, flooding, silting of rivers, and the gradual transformation of forests into grasslands and eventually deserts.

Thus, Africa's rapidly growing population has created pressure to increase food production, prompting shifts from small-scale farming to mechanized agriculture. While this change aims to improve yields, it has also led to the overuse of arid and semi-arid lands, depleting soil fertility and increasing dependence on chemical fertilizers.

In addition, many African societies have adopted a taste for Western lifestyles, which fuels a demand for imported goods and industrial products. To support this consumption, agricultural production has intensified, relying heavily on fertilizers and pesticides. When it rains, these chemicals are washed into rivers, lakes, and oceans, contaminating the water and endangering both human health and aquatic life (Ogungbemi, 2007).

Furthermore, the large-scale export of agricultural goods to Europe and the Americas has often benefited developed nations more than Africa itself. In trying to integrate into the global

economy, modern Africa has, in many cases, strengthened the wealth of industrialized countries while depleting its own natural and environmental resources on its own.

> Ironically, what is often called "development" tends to benefit wealthy nations more than the poorer ones it is supposed to help. The aid and investment provided by rich countries frequently end up circling back to strengthen their own economies, while the intended beneficiaries the poor in developing nations see little real improvement in their lives. Because of this repeating pattern, many grassroots movements in the Global South have come to view the idea of "development" not as a path to progress, but as something that can actually harm and exploit the very people it claims to support (Agbi, 2003, 55).

Water

Segun Ogungbemi (2007) points out that Africa is richly endowed with water resources from rivers, lakes, and streams to vast coastlines along the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Water is a vital element for all forms of life and is essential for domestic use, farming, and industry. Yet, human activities have significantly damaged these once-clean water sources. Ogungbemi laments how foreign countries have contributed to this pollution.

One notable case reported in the media described how certain U.S. companies planned to ship toxic industrial waste to African countries. Because such waste was too hazardous to dispose of under American environmental laws, these companies sought agreements with some African governments to dump it locally in exchange for foreign currency. Shockingly, a few nations entered talks to accept the deal under the guise of "development." A related incident occurred when Nigerian students in Italy uncovered a plot to deposit toxic waste on Nigeria's coast. Although the Italian government later assisted in cleaning up the area, several Nigerians who unknowingly reused the containers to store water lost their lives. Beyond the human tragedy, many animals and aquatic species also perished as a result of the contamination. While industrialized countries have played a major role in polluting African waters, local industries have also contributed to the problem. Even rural communities experience pollution from domestic and agricultural activities, showing that the issue extends beyond industrial zones.

Air

Clean air is another crucial natural resource that sustains both human and animal life. Without it, even plants cannot survive. Unfortunately, air quality across much of Africa is deteriorating because of human actions. Many rural communities still rely heavily on firewood for cooking, and practices like bush burning are common, both of which contribute to air pollution. Modern industrialization and urbanization have made the problem worse. Factories release smoke and waste into the atmosphere, while traffic congestion in cities such as Lagos, Ibadan, Nairobi, Accra, and Addis Ababa creates dense smog and harmful emissions.

Another factor is the excessive focus of many African governments on military expansion. As Tolba observes that,

> Only a small number of African countries spend more on agriculture than on defense. Instead of addressing environmental and developmental challenges, leaders often invest in weapons to maintain power, sometimes even using them against their own citizens.

This obsession with power not only diverts resources from agriculture and the environment but also contributes to ecological and human destruction.

Population

Africa's population is expanding rapidly, putting immense pressure on the environment. The balance between human activity and the natural ecosystem has already been severely disrupted. Although natural disasters have also claimed many lives, overpopulation remains a major concern. As more people require food, water, and land, the strain on the continent's ecosystems grows, worsening issues like soil erosion, desertification, and resource depletion.

Human Impact on the African Environment

The relationship between people and the environment in sub-Saharan Africa clearly shows how human actions affect ecological balance. Desertification, for instance, has become a severe problem, not only because of climate change but also because of overgrazing, deforestation, and poor farming practices. The adoption of Western agricultural methods such as irrigation, deep tilling, and heavy fertilizer use has further degraded the soil. In some areas, irrigated lands have become waterlogged and saline, rendering them infertile. Overuse of wells in dry zones has led to overgrazing and land compaction, worsening the spread of deserts.

The Niger Delta in Nigeria offers a stark example of this human-environment interaction. Oil exploration by companies such as Shell, Chevron, and BP has caused severe pollution, leading to health problems, soil and water contamination, and loss of biodiversity. Cleaning up these environmental damages is expensive and often hindered by political and economic interests. Human exploitation of land and sea resources often creates a vicious cycle: as people try to recover lost productivity, they exploit the environment even more, leading to further destruction. Functionalist thinkers like Merton argue that societies must recognize both the intended and unintended consequences of their actions to maintain ecological balance.

The Niger Delta Conflict

The Niger Delta is home to rich biodiversity and vital coastal ecosystems that support local livelihoods. However, pollution from gas flaring, oil spills, and industrial waste has devastated the area. Human settlements, agriculture, and infrastructure projects have further damaged the marine environment. Disputes over resource control between the federal government, oil-producing states, and local communities have intensified tensions. In 1999, for instance, conflict erupted in Odi, Bayelsa State, when local youths protested government neglect and the environmental destruction caused by oil activities. The military's violent response led to massive loss of life and widespread destruction of property. These events highlight how environmental degradation, economic inequality, and political power struggles are deeply intertwined in Africa. Sustainable progress,

therefore, requires not only technological and economic solutions but also moral and political responsibility toward people and the planet.

Efforts Toward Restoring the African Environment

Human beings, as moral and social creatures, have an obligation to protect not only their own lives but also those of others and the environment that sustains them. Across various African communities, states, and nations, campaigns for afforestation and environmental renewal have been launched to reverse years of degradation and neglect. One of the major global attempts to address environmental decline was the United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Copenhagen. Many viewed this meeting as a potential turning point a beacon of hope for ordinary people, especially Africans, who have long suffered the harshest effects of environmental destruction. However, despite the high expectations, the conference ultimately reinforced the dominance of powerful nations over weaker ones. The discussions exposed a sobering truth: no meaningful progress can be achieved in tackling the global environmental crisis without first confronting global inequality, consumerism, and capitalist exploitation.

The Copenhagen Conference and Its Failures

The Copenhagen Summit was intended to produce a binding global agreement on climate change, but it ended in disappointment. Developing nations pushed for strong commitments to reduce emissions and financial support to help them transition to greener economies. Wealthier nations, however, resisted these demands. The United States, in particular, was accused of undermining any possibility of a fair and effective agreement. Instead of a concrete plan of action, the summit concluded with a non-binding statement a vague document that lacked accountability and enforceable goals.

As Venezuela's President Hugo Chávez observed that,

> The wealthiest nations lacked the political will to change their unsustainable patterns of production and consumption. Their behavior suggested that preserving privilege and profit mattered more than saving the planet. His remarks captured the frustration of many developing nations who saw the conference as a failure of justice and moral responsibility.

Throughout the event, protests erupted both inside and outside the conference halls. Delegates from southern nations walked out in protest, while demonstrators on the streets faced arrests and violence. Environmental organizations like Friends of the Earth were temporarily expelled from the venue, and new Danish laws were introduced to suppress activism. Many felt that Copenhagen was "dead on arrival" a conference trapped within the logic of market-based solutions such as carbon trading.

Carbon Trading and Its Flaws

Carbon trading was promoted as a way to limit emissions by putting a price on pollution. However, critics argue that it has become a profitable business for bankers and corporations, creating a $100

billion market without delivering meaningful environmental benefits. Companies often receive overly generous carbon allowances and evade restrictions through loopholes and poor monitoring. Mechanisms like the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) allow wealthy nations to "offset" their emissions by funding questionable projects in developing countries many of which would have happened anyway.

Thus, even a supposedly "successful" outcome at Copenhagen would likely have produced policies with little real impact. The targets were unenforceable, and the promised funding for developing countries risked ending up in corporate hands rather than aiding vulnerable communities.

Voices of Resistance and Hope

Some environmental experts, like James Hansen, argued that failure at Copenhagen was preferable to adopting a flawed agreement. Yet, time is running out; unchecked climate change threatens to reach irreversible tipping points. Despite the setback, a group of nations including Bolivia, Cuba, and Venezuela brought renewed energy and a radical vision to the talks. These countries advocated for eco-socialist reforms, calling for deep emission cuts, recognition of the "carbon debt" owed by industrialized nations, and global ecological justice. Their leadership inspired movements for climate justice that extended beyond the conference halls into the streets.

Criticism of carbon trading has also grown. Organizations such as Friends of the Earth now openly oppose it, arguing that it could even spark another financial crisis. In its place, activists are pushing for a Green New Deal a plan that links financial reform with large-scale investment in renewable energy. Campaigners estimate that such programs could create millions of jobs while transitioning economies toward sustainability. Some leaders, including Evo Morales and Hugo Chávez, have gone further, challenging the capitalist obsession with endless growth. They argue that any genuine solution must question the very structure of global capitalism, recognize ecological limits, and build alternative systems based on participation, justice, and community welfare.

Africa's Experience and the Question of Inequality

For many African representatives, the Copenhagen conference confirmed their fears that the process was rigged in favor of wealthy nations. Many felt their role was merely symbolic — to endorse pre-written agreements and appear in photo opportunities with world leaders. Leaked documents revealed that industrialized countries planned to impose lighter emission cuts on themselves while demanding stricter limits from developing nations. This sparked outrage among African delegates, some of whom walked out in protest.

The final deal, signed by only 28 countries, replaced a more inclusive and generous UN proposal that had greater support from African nations. The new agreement effectively divided the developing world, with major emerging economies such as China, India, Brazil, and South Africa co-opted through private negotiations. Meanwhile, some African nations were persuaded or pressured into supporting the accord through promises or threats tied to foreign aid.

This manipulation left Africa once again marginalized. Lacking both the financial means and the technology often locked behind patents many African countries remain unable to effectively combat climate change or transition to clean energy. The pledge of $100 billion a year by 2020 from richer nations turned out to be vague and inadequate, with no clear funding mechanisms. Many fear that existing aid will simply be rebranded as "climate finance," offering no real new support.

The Way Forward

It has become clear that meaningful climate progress for Africa and other developing regions is impossible without reforming global trade, political, and financial systems. However, there is still hope. The failure of Copenhagen has sparked a growing determination among African nations to work together and find their own voice in international negotiations. A genuine African coalition, grounded in solidarity and shared purpose, could become a powerful force for global environmental justice.

Civil society including activists, scholars, and local communities must take the lead where political leaders have failed. African citizens must hold their governments accountable, demand transparency, and insist on responsible participation in global climate efforts. Likewise, citizens in industrialized countries must challenge their own governments' hypocrisy and expose the ways they pressure poorer nations into accepting unfair deals.

Conclusion

Despite growing awareness and numerous campaigns, humanity still behaves as though environmental destruction has no consequence. Many continue to act without concern for how their actions harm their neighbors or future generations. Yet, hope remains. Humanity has only one planet, and its survival depends on our collective willingness to protect and restore it. We owe this duty not just to ourselves, but to those who will inherit the Earth after us.

Article Publication Details

This article is published in the **Globenix Multidisciplinary Journal**, ISSN XXXX-XXXX (Online). In Volume 1 (2025), Issue 1 (November - December) - 2025

The journal is published and managed by **Globenix Publisher**.

Acknowledgements

We sincerely thank the editors and the reviewers for their valuable suggestions on this paper.

Funding

The authors declare that no funding was received for this work.

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